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REPLY OF LIEUT.-COL. PILSEN


TO

EMIL SCHALK'S CRITICISMS

OF

THE CAMPAIGN IN THE MOUNTAIN DEPARTMENT,
UNDER

MAJ.-GEN. J. C. FREMONT.



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NEW YORK, June, 1863.

To MR. EMIL SCHALK,

Author of "Summary of the Art of War:"

Sir,—Before writing a book which pretends to the dignity of history, an author is bound to exercise the closest scrutiny in discovering the truth. A single page not founded in verity, may be the source of infinite harm, and ought, as it does, to discredit the whole book, especially when it assumes the character of a severe criticism, directed, not only to tarnish the glory of the nation and the bravery of our soldiers, but to injure the reputation of living persons in stations of trust, whose honor is identified with the national well-being. Such is the case with the Second Volume of your work on the Art of War, discussing the Campaigns of 1862–1863.

I am aware that you preface this discussion by the admission that many of your statements may be incorrect, but that such errors do not affect the truth of the application of the great principles of the art of war.

I deny this proposition altogether in so far as your attempt to criticise the conduct of the campaign of '62 and '63, and there could not be presented a better evidence of the absurdity of trying to reason out correct results where the foundation is false, than in your criticisms of the campaign in the Mountain Department under the command of Genl. Fremont.

There, to my surprise, I noticed a presentation of the battle of Cross Keys, which not only has not any foundation in fact, but perverts and mutilates so utterly the whole transaction, that the full weight of my introductory remarks is not a sufficient measure of your culpability.

As I took active part in that battle, in the capacity of a Chief of Artillery, and can bear testimony with full knowledge in the premises, I undertake to enter into a discussion upon this subject, and to give you the opportunity to do that campaign, its

leader, and yourself, justice before the world. On the pages 102 and 104 of the above-named book, you chose to describe that action in the following terms :

" Genl. Fremont, who had arrived meanwhile at Harrisonburg, on receiving the intelligence that Jackson was crossing the Shenandoah at a place called Port Republic, moved his army in the direction of Port Republic, but was stopped at Cross Keys, a place about half way from his destination, by the rear guard of the Rebels, about 5,000 strong, drawn up in line of battle, to cover the crossing of their train and main body over the Shenandoah. General Fremont attacked their position *with 20,000 men, but without ensemble, and got beaten in detail.*

" While his rear-guard was beating Fremont, Jackson, who had already crossed with his main body, found himself opposed by Genl. Tyler, of Genl. Shields' division, who was sent from Lauray to Waynesborough, to intercept him or prevent him crossing. Genl. Tyler paid dearly for this attempt," etc., etc.

First.—The field return of our command for the 1st of June, near Strasburg, a week before the battle of Cross Keys, gives :

Total of officers present for duty.....	641
" enlisted men " 	11,031
	<hr/>
Total.....	11,672.

This return being made up from date, "near Strasburg," was, under the circumstances of the march, considerably reduced by the loss, from all causes, between that date and the Cross Keys' battle, June 8th. When therefore we say that the actual strength of our forces in that battle did not amount to more than ten thousand five hundred (10,500) men, we give quite as high a number as the returns justify. This official document is a sufficient evidence against your statement.

Second.—In reference to Jackson's forces, we were fully informed from prisoners and the inhabitants of the country and our own spies, that they numbered more than 22,000 men. The current report of the country through which both corps passed, put Jackson's at 25,000 men. Two of our scouts, taken prisoners at Port Republic, severally reported the force on his rolls at

31,000 men. There are, besides, telegraphic despatches, showing that Jackson's force at Orange Court House, on his march from Port Republic to Richmond, was over 40,000 men. Jackson overestimated our force. He erroneously supposed us 18,000 men strong, and this, in connection with the fact that he believed us united with a portion of McDowell's corps, may explain his hasty retreat before us.

Information verifying our conjectures at the time in regard both to this intended attack, our estimate of numbers, and other interesting points, was lately obtained by a Federal officer taken prisoner by Jackson's corps at Chancellorsville, who, having been with us at Cross Keys, talked over that battle with officers of Jackson's staff.

At Harrisonburg, Longstreet had already effected a junction with Jackson, and it was by his positive order that Jackson was prevented from attacking Fremont in the night of the sixth (6th) at Harrisonburg, he having decided to do so at eleven at night. So that in the engagements about Port Republic, the troops of both Longstreet and Jackson undoubtedly took part.

Third.—That we had met at Cross Keys only the rear-guard of the rebels, 5,000 men strong, you evidently deduce from the assertion, that his main body in the same time was busy with crossing the Shenandoah and fighting Gen. Tyler's forces. This assertion, however, sir, with all deference, is a false one. No engagement between Jackson's main body and Gen. Tyler took place on this day; but the fact is, that Col. Carroll, of Shields' division, in the morning of this very day, reached Port Republic with a small body, and found no rebels there in force occupied with crossing or protecting the bridge. That the bridge was not destroyed, does not belong to our account, and may be attributed to Carroll's expectation that this bridge would serve later as a good medium for throwing over Shields' division, and effecting the long expected union with our forces. It is further true, that Jackson had notice of the threatening movement of Col. Carroll, and that in time he detached eight regiments cavalry and infantry, and one battery, to protect the bridge. This body occupied on the same day Port Republic, but had not any engagement with Federal troops, as Col.

Carroll, considering himself too weak, fell back for some distance upon the approaching brigade of Gen. Tyler. With the exception of those eight regiments and one battery, all of Jackson's forces were left at Cross Keys, to check there our further progress.

To any man, who understands something of war, the extension of the enemy's line of battle, amounting to nearly two miles, the number of his guns and the heavy masses, which we found opposed to us at every point, and principally on his right wing, must have carried the conviction that we had not engaged a rear-guard of 5,000 men, but an enemy superior to our numbers.

Such being the case, I cannot omit to observe, that the battle of Cross Keys in reality was very different from the appearance you have given it in the abusing lines of your book, which presents a total perversion of the real facts.

Let us now inquire into the correctness of your further assertion, that we attacked without *ensemble*.

The attack was prepared, before the enemy was discovered in position, from a point where the road leading to Port Republic divided into two branches. Without having either county maps, or guides, or knowledge of the ground, knowing only the vicinity, and supposing the probable position of the enemy, the whole command, without hesitation or delay, was formed into two nearly equally strong columns, which entered upon the two branches. So we followed rather our own impression, and the supposition proved itself correct. When the enemy soon after was discovered, we had the advantage of being able to deploy both columns at once, and had in a very admirably short time a well combined line of battle in the whole extent of the enemy's position. Every other manœuvre would have cost more time, and proved itself, perhaps, disastrous. The enemy, indeed, expected that we would follow the main road, and overlook the side road, for therealong he held concealed his left wing, pushed forward with the undoubted intention to take us in the flank, and perhaps seize our line of operation. This, of course, was prevented by our manœuvre, and the enemy's left wing driven in.

As it was supposed by the formation of the roads, and by the

understood direction of the bridge of Port Republic, that the right wing of the enemy was his strategical flank, we accordingly gave to our left wing the strength of three brigades, while the three other brigades of the command had to fill out the centre and the right wing. The plan was to press in the strategical flank of the enemy and seize his road of retreat. Two brigades of the German division were trusted with the settlement of this problem, and had a third brigade of the same division as reserve in their immediate rear. For the same purpose the brigade of our right formed an echellon somewhat backwards, and was so posted that its weight could be thrown in another direction, according to circumstances. While our left wing was ordered to attack, the centre and the right had to watch the progress, and to act accordingly. So the battle was fought with four brigades in line of battle in immediate action, one brigade on the right in a somewhat backward echellon participating according to circumstances, but being at hand for further disposal, and one brigade as reserve in the immediate rear of the left wing. We had ten batteries, of which eight and a half, in the short time of less than thirty minutes, were brought into favorable positions in the immediate face of the enemy, although he was posted in the woods greatly to our disadvantage, and we were compelled to go in search of his precise position, often coming upon him in very close quarters. When I now add to the tactical dispositions above described, that our line of battle was perpendicularly based upon our line of operation; that it remained so throughout the whole action; that it was perfectly correct in reference to connection and formation; that we commanded every approach to our flanks and our rear, and that during and after the battle we were in the full attitude of the offensive,—I ask you whether supposition, plan and disposition in that battle were with or without *ensemble*; and further ask, how much better you, or any other one pretending to illustrate the principles of the art of war, would have probably acted in the premises?

There is now the question to be settled, whether we got beaten in detail.

As no judgment upon the result of a battle can be made by single incidents on the battle-field, however some regiments

may have been beaten or repulsed, and as such a judgment can be passed only by taking into consideration the whole of the event, I will briefly sum up the result of this day's fighting.

Col. Cluseret, who had the advance, took the centre and drove the enemy some two miles from their original position. Supporting the centre came General Milroy, who, in connection with our right formed by General Schenck, had pursued the enemy's left wing for nearly the same distance, while our left wing, under Generals Stahel and Bohlen, after having advanced in their attack for about a mile, was in its turn compelled to retreat for about this distance, and did not retain the advantage it had gained. The rebels, foreseeing our intention to press in their strategical flank, strengthened their right wing and directed their principal energies upon that point; but while they succeeded in repulsing the brunt of our left wing by superior forces and the most-favorable position, this advantage could not counterbalance the success of our centre and right, which, however slowly, still steadily advanced and could not be stopped, while the enemy, in his attempt to pursue our left wing, as soon as he deployed out of the woods, was so badly treated by our artillery that he hurried back again into his woods with heavy loss.

This, sir, is the real result of the battle of Cross Keys, and no man can say that our forces were beaten either in detail or in the whole.

General Fremont intended to make another general attack, but despatches were received from General Shields, containing the intelligence, that he had sent forward Col. Carroll to burn the bridge at Port Republic, and that his forces were already at that place. As it was well understood that Jackson could not escape under such circumstances, and that the burning of the bridge would produce a decisive battle, for which there was no more time, as the day was in the decline, the second general attack for this day was suspended, a strong position taken, the necessary rest given to the men, and every preparation made for the decisive battle, which was anticipated for the next morning. Unfortunately, as I mentioned in another place, Colonel Carroll did not burn the bridge, and this gave a fair opportunity to General Jackson to save his forces from their dangerous posi-

tion. The hasty and stealthy manner in which he withdrew during that night (the 8th) would seem to indicate that the vigor and determination with which General Fremont pursued and attacked him had a great moral effect upon his division.

The morning after the battle of Cross Keys, General Fremont's corps moved towards the Port Republic bridge, maintaining an admirable order of battle, and advancing with great steadiness and rapidity. A column of smoke arising in the direction of Port Republic indicated that the bridge had been fired, but whether by Carroll or Jackson, it was impossible to learn. Our corps had proceeded but one or two miles, when the sound of cannon showed that the federal forces on the other side and Jackson were engaged at or near the bridge. Pressing forward in the most brilliant manner, our troops reached the Shenandoah, but only to find Jackson safely across, the bridge destroyed, and the federal forces on the other side defeated.

The building of a bridge was immediately begun, a reconnoitering party was sent out to ascertain the whereabouts of Shields' forces, and preparations made to renew the pursuit the next day. To the surprise of every one, however, Captain Haskel, who had been sent across the river with the reconnoitering party, returned with information, that General Shields had been ordered to leave the Lauray Valley, and was then on the march towards Fredericksburg. This left General Fremont's left flank entirely exposed, rendered it utterly impossible to pursue Jackson further with his small force, and left him no option but to return to Harrisonburg. At that point a telegram, sent before the battle of Cross Keys, reached the General, instructing him to cease his pursuit of Jackson at that place, and strengthen himself against an attack. It was found, however, that the forces of Generals Banks and Sigel were not to move above Strasburg. Harrisonburg, however strong its position may be strategically for a large army, is dangerous in the extreme for a small force. Approachable by nine different roads, there is constant danger of being cut off, or having the lines of communication broken. The opinions of Generals Fremont, Banks, and Sigel coincided as to the necessity of a further withdrawal. These opinions being communicated to the President, he signified his acquiescence in the movement, and General Fremont took position first

at Mount Jackson, and afterwards effected a junction with Banks and Sigel at Middletown, at which place on the afternoon of the 28th of June, he asked to be relieved from command, in consequence of General Pope's nomination to the command of the army of Virginia.

This, sir, is the true version of the battle of Cross Keys and of the next subsequent events.

What Jackson's own idea of his situation was, is very plainly shown by the following extract from the statements of Captain C. N. Goulding, who was General Pope's chief quartermaster in the field, and who was taken prisoner upon the occasion of Stuart's noted raid at Catlett's station :

"Captain Goulding had several interviews with Jackson, and formed a high estimate of his capabilities. Jackson told him that during the entire war he had never been so hard pressed as he was by Fremont in the Shenandoah Valley; that he never was in such a dangerous position as at Cross Keys and Port Republic; and he freely admitted that he would have been captured, army, bag and baggage, had Fremont been reinforced or supported by McDowell."

As I hope to have sufficiently demonstrated by the above recital the ignorance with which you have described and adjudicated the battle of Cross Keys, we will turn to those pages of your "so-called" history, where you do your utmost in commenting upon the Shenandoah Valley campaign, considered under strategetical principles.

You say on the pages 176 and 177 :

"The direction chosen by the corps of Fremont and McDowell, for the intercepting of Jackson, was a wrong one. To march to the place where Jackson had only been heard of, according to the last accounts, was evidently coming too late. To effect the object, a very simple exercise of arithmetic would have shown where to march to. From Winchester, where Jackson was, on the 25th, to Harrisburg, in the Shenandoah valley, is three days' march; from Franklin, where Fremont was, two; and from Falmouth, where McDowell's corps camped, three forced or four ordinary days' march. Both Union Generals might have gained certainly one, and McDowell easily two days' march on Jackson, who could not have been immediately informed of their movements. Hence, if General McDowell had marched to Stannardsville, and thence through Swiss Run Gap to Lauray, occupying Chester Gap and the road to New Market, Jackson

could not have hindered him from doing so ; if, at the same time, he had pushed a column from Warrenton to Manassas Gap, which could easily have been occupied and held by a small force, he might have been in those places on the fourth day, and formed by his left wing a junction with Gen. Fremont, marching from Franklin to Harrisburg, and moving thence upon Broadway and New Market. Both Generals, pushing rapidly forward and throwing out cavalry to the right and the left, near the gaps, to remain well informed of Jackson's movements, might have been in this position on the fourth day. And, supposing they had gained only one day on Jackson, he could not have prevented them. It will be seen, that by acting in this way, they might, with their main force, have continually prevented Jackson returning South, whatever course he might take, as they could always reach the decisive point before him. That point would have been evidently the spot to the right or left, where Jackson tried to pass them. That they would have gained several marches on him, is well proved by the fact, that at the commencement of June, he was still at Strasburg, and on the seventh only, at Port Republic, at which place, or somewhat below, the Union Generals might have been by the 29th of May, etc., etc."

In reading these lines, I felt so impressed with their absurdity, that you must excuse me if here and there some expressions of good-humored contempt intermix with more serious reflections. Let me try, before all, to place you on the correct point of view from which you would have judged this campaign, if better acquainted with the situation. A consistent simple exercise of arithmetic, as you are in the habit of making, will serve to exhibit our condition. Our depot of supplies was New Creek, eighty (80) miles, say five stations, from Franklin. We had at command about three hundred wagons, which, divided into the whole way to New Creek and back, shows thirty wagons arriving daily at Franklin. It may give you a pleasure to calculate, that thirty wagons freight furnish nearly about a daily ration for an army of about 14,000 men, which then was the number of our corps. So provided, we could have lived without any apprehension, from day to day, and perhaps we might even have succeeded in accumulating some provisions for extraordinary occasions, if at the same time we had commanded the elements, and if those thirty wagons could have been used only for the transportation of rations. Unfortunately, the most unfavorable weather, and therefore the worst condition of roads, embarrassed the forwarding of the

vehicles, and the army corps, just newly gathered together, wanted very many other things besides provisions. Thus our transportation could furnish only half a ration daily, and we had to subsist upon fresh beef alone, bread or crackers being a precious luxury. A malignant disposition would discover, in this circumstance, a theme for new accusations, but, as everything was done to prevent such an eventuality without power of remedy in our hands, I dispense with dwelling upon this subject. Would you now please to add to this condition of our fasting army, that the country, in all directions, from Franklin was made almost a desert, affording neither forage nor food; that the roads were obstructed by the inhabitants and covered with mud, of whose character no one, who has not seen that part of country, can form any conception; and I ask you, if you or anybody else under such circumstances, would have dared to prolong the line of communication 40 miles further, and over mountains, thus assuming the responsibility of the sure ruin of the army? There are difficulties and situations in this country, sir, of so peculiar a character, that they will defeat every kind of speculation, if they are not taken into consideration, and the total disregard of this particularity at your hands, is the reason why you accumulate blunders upon blunders in your critique upon this campaign. In order to have this fully evidenced, and to show how impracticable and ridiculous your critical interpretations are, we will perform together the grand strategical movement towards Harrisonburg, which you undertake to make the people believe is the only correct one we had to execute with our army. The first result, by proceeding to Harrisonburg, will be the prolongation of your line of communication to the length of 120 miles, with a means of transportation, which could furnish only half a ration for a line of 80 miles, and with an army which suffered already every kind of privation. As you will observe by the aid of the map, the road leading to Harrisonburg turns almost perpendicularly from our previous road, and leaves Franklin in a corner. If you wish to feel sure that your line of communication, the only line of your vital power, will not be cut in this corner by an attack from Stanton, you must leave a sufficient garrison at Franklin, which, should it be equal to the probable

emergency, would amount to nearly a brigade. In this way you divide your forces. Arriving with your main body at Harrisonburg, you propose to move thence upon Broadway and New Market. Once more the road crosses perpendicularly your line of communication, and a new corner is left behind, more dangerous than Franklin ; being a city of considerable population, and accessible by nine different roads. I begin now to be very indifferent, whether you will secure your line of supply by leaving another garrison at Harrisonburg or not. You rather have, to say the truth, no more supplies, and the boldness with which you nevertheless push forward with a half-starved army, has already infected my brain, and like a veteran—of your imagining—I march with you forward upon the graves of my starved comrades. I don't care whether the army has already revolted or will do so the next moment—I don't know how many have remained behind partly sick, or starved, and partly deserted. I continue to advance with you upon New Market. There, as you suppose, we shall find McDowell, and “push with him rapidly forward, throwing out cavalry to the right and left near the gaps, to remain well informed of Jackson's movements.” Should we not find McDowell at New Market or elsewhere—he, perhaps, having been a little more cautious than you—this will not make any difference ; you are a bold man, who always will push rapidly forward, even should it be on a wooden horse and with the shadows of the ruined army. Jackson, that is your strategical fancy, must at any cost be prevented from returning South. As such an ingenious and heroic strategy certainly merits a good success, I am the first to wish you the most thorough. I will, on this account, suppose that to this very moment everything has been going on perfectly well, and that, without any harm to you and your troops, you fortunately have effected the desired junction with McDowell ; who, as bold and aerial as you, has fled over the country, and reached the spot of destination at the fixed time. This being supposed, you have acquired the strength of about 30,000 men, no matter whether supplied or not ; and now comes the glorious moment when you are directly pushing forward against poor Jackson, who, according to the horoscope you have cast for him, will be prevented re-

turning South, whatever course he might take, as "you always can reach the decisive point before him."

What a pity that you cannot be as good as the heroic words in your forbearing book, and that Jackson, being as cunning a fellow as you, gets in time information of your adventurous movement, and while you effect a junction with McDowell at New Market, strikes from Winchester into the road leading to Petersburg, seizes there your line of communication, and marches at his ease to Franklin, where he captures everything left behind, and goes well supplied and enriched with spoils of every description triumphantly to Stanton, from where he can reach Richmond quicker than from Port Republic.

How, sir, would you have prevented Jackson from doing so after having effected your fanciful junction with McDowell at New Market *via* Harrisburg? Would you have followed him through the mountains to Petersburg, or turned back to Franklin, to be there before his arrival? In the first case, you may apply your favorite exercise of arithmetic, and will see, that whatever course you might have taken, Jackson from Winchester would surely have reached the passes of Wardsville one or two days before you, and sacrificing there in the most formidable position a very small force, would have contested your further advance for days, while his main body, unmolested and with perfect ease, would have reached Petersburg and Franklin.

In the event, that you should have intended to return to Franklin, to be there before Jackson's arrival, I ask you, how possibly would you have carried out this new stratagem. Being still out of breath with incessant marching, not having yet established a new line of supplies, and having the previous line cut from New Creek to Franklin, you would have been, so to say, planted in the air. The mere idea, to go under such circumstances back to Franklin, not having anything to live upon, and having no prospect to get anything, would be the most gigantic nonsense. Fortunately, this eventuality was based upon the supposition, that you had effected a junction with McDowell at New Market *via* Harrisburg, and as such a manœuvre was only the chimeric offspring of an ill-disposed imagination, with regard to the real condition of our troops

and supplies at Franklin, we may consider this excursion of ideas as a mere experiment to show how absurd even in this case your assertion is, that you would have prevented Jackson from ever returning South.

I think there is not much more to be said about your strategy. The exposure of this example is sufficient to rank you in the category of theoretically overstrained capacities, so frequently imported from Europe, who never will assimilate with the practices and the peculiarities of this country, and remain for their lifetime idle fancy mongers, forgetful, or ignorant, of the fact that the theories of European countries, growing out of wars over limited territories, full of supplies, with excellent roads, and crowded populations, do not fit to America with its great extent, scattered populations, bad roads and limited supplies.

Your entire deductions even from your mis-statements, I have proven to be illogical and unmilitary. They are grossly absurd in view of their entire untruth. There are still other passages in your book quite as full of contradiction and ignorance as those already refuted. My business is finished with the discussions above. I will make one other extract, however, which is more of a personal character, and deserves to be treated as such. It was not germane to the alleged purpose of your book, and was entirely gratuitous. On page 176 I find the following :

"The action at Cross Keys is highly creditable to the rebel general, and
 "to his men who fought it. The general, on the contrary, who lets slip
 "the opportunity of crushing 5,000 men with 20,000, and, what is worse,
 "who permitted himself to be beaten under such circumstances, has cer-
 "tainly but very few claims to the title of 'general.'"

After the irrefutable evidence I have brought to bear against every single statement of your lucubrations, taking in consideration the time you had to gather true arguments from authentic sources before writing your book, I feel justified in saying that, although I ranked you in the category of idle fancy mongers, you this time may not have acquired all the nonsense in your closet, but rather behind the "*coulisses*," where you assisted in plotting a mean forgery.

To censure in that manner a man who has spent a life in the civil and military service of the country, and who, besides the skill and energy he displayed in the West, in this particular campaign brought a striking example before the country, of what true zeal and ingenuity of a General can perform, while blamelessly and most vigorously accomplishing the chase of a superior enemy, after overcoming 100 miles in seven days, and every obstacle in his way,—to condemn, I say, such a man in such shameless words, having no other arguments for the denunciation than falsehoods,—this, sir, is nothing but a plain villainy, and such, I am convinced, will be the judgment of the public.

JOHN PILSEN, Lt.-Col.,
A. D. C. on General Fremont's Staff.

To Mr. EMIL SCHALK, Author of "Summary of the Art of War,"
Philadelphia, Pa.





